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SUBJECT: DCM RAISES WORLD VISION'S SUSPENSION WITH THE MFA

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel A. Russell.
Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

11. (C) The DCM expressed our concern over the suspension of World Vision's activities in Chechnya with MFA North America Department Director Igor Neverov in a March 5 meeting. He noted our continued support for World Vision, its history of excellent work in the region, and asked if MFA could provide further details on the basis for the suspension. The DCM noted that Chechen Republic officials, in fact, have written a letter in support of World Vision's work there. Neverov clarified that World Vision was an American NGO and undertook to look into the case. REFCOORD separately raised the issue with interlocutors in the MFA's Department of Humanitarian Cooperation and Human Rights.

12. (C) Although successfully re-registered by Russia's Federal Registration Service in December, World Vision staff were told in January by a representative of the Federal Security Service (FSB) that the NGO would not be granted access to Chechnya and that it should suspend its activities in the republic. The suspension, which has never been provided in writing, followed the arrest of a World Vision local employee in November after security officers allegedly found weapons and explosives in his vehicle. FSB or law enforcement officials had not given any previous indications that investigators were connecting the arrest to the NGO. World Vision has continued its activities in Ingushetiya and North Ossetia without interruption.

13. (C) World Vision Country Director Siobhan Kimmerle told us that World Vision has not had any further communication from the FSB. Chechen officials have sent a letter of support for World Vision to the FSB, but they have not been able to provide any further information. Kimmerle told us that the NGO is quietly pursuing resumption of its activities in Chechnya absent any explicit order from authorities. We have urged World Vision to proceed cautiously.

14. (C) Comment: We will continue to follow this issue closely, and thus far no other NGOs working in the North Caucasus have reported any problems with the FSB. To our knowledge, World Vision's conduct in the region has been exemplary. We are not in a position to judge the veracity of the charges brought against World Vision's local employee or whether this may simply be part of the cyclical pattern of harassment of Western NGOs by the security service. End comment.
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